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9-1-1958

Growing with Music

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Recommended Citation

Heitland, Shirley Adams, "Growing with Music" (1958). *SDSU Extension Leaflets*. 198.
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EXTENSION LEAFLET 191

SEPTEMBER 1958

growing with music



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Growing With Music

By Shirley Adams Heitland
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"Je suis Pierre, l'enfant de France." Does this sound very strange to you? Had you heard the French language from birth, and later studied it, you could easily read, write, speak, and understand French. Likewise, a child that grows up in a musical home will understand the language of music . . . the voice of human emotions for which there is no other medium of expression.

The very elements of life are musical. The fact that you can walk, breathe, run, jump, and use your hands is rhythm. Our adult lives are built on the rhythm of routine, and all of us love the beauty of music.

Can All Children Be Musical

"Is it possible for every child to become musical?" It is not only possible, it is probable if the child is given a proper start. A feeling for music starts very early in life, and musical development is as natural a process as learning to talk.

IT IS SKILL IN UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN, not skill in music techniques that brings rewards in fostering a child's musical interest. Love for music is as natural as a child's love of play.

Man's first instrument is his voice. The small baby responds by listening to sounds and begins experimenting with his own voice at the age of 4 to 8 weeks. He enjoys the happy singing of his mother. A wise mother will substitute pleasant sounds for the unpleasant whenever possible. At six months, a child can make all the sounds he will later use in talking. Rattles, bells, and noise making toys interest him. By ten months the child imitates, and can do such rhyth-

mical activities as "pat a cake." The one to three year old child is interested in nursery rhymes and songs because he likes the repetition and clash of words and sounds like "diddle diddle dumpling" and "hickory dickory dock." Books, radio, phonograph, and the television set fascinate him. This age group enjoys listening to records of nursery rhymes and simple tunes.

The child is experiencing musical growth, because he is singing, playing, paying attention to various sounds and trying to reproduce them. Accomplishment is measured by enjoyment, not performance.

The pre-school years are the most impressionable years of a child's life. The parent is responsible for developing music interest in the home. Trained personnel guide children once they are in school. Enjoy your child, sing with him, teach him musical games and activities, listen with him, and help him notice the many sounds of the world around him.

Children Learn Fast

During the early school years, children learn to use their singing voice, to match tones, and to become acquainted with the printed page of music. They respond to rhythmic play and continue to imitate sounds.

The desire to take music lessons, and to play an instrument will likely come in grades one through eight. There is no definite or set age when a child should begin taking lessons, but he cannot cope with musical terms and notes until he has had some experience with them. To subject a child who has had no experience with music to note reading is like teaching him to read before he talks. The musical experience the child has had in the home will determine the age at which he can handle formal lessons. The child is ready when he asks to take lessons.

At this point you may question the importance and value of music. What can your child gain from studying music? He will develop muscular co-ordination, self-discipline, learn mental and physical agility, training in memorization, and have an effective outlet for his energies and emotions. He will be ready to join a musical group, and have the pleasure and group identity so vital to an adolescent. The joy of creating,

and of appreciating the beautiful will carry over into his adult life. He will have gained valuable experience through performance, will have an enjoyable hobby and can use his leisure time effectively. Above all he will be thankful to his parents for helping him, and encouraging him to discover the world of music.

What Should He Play

What to play? This is the big question! The instrument should be chosen by the child and suited to his interests and aptitudes. It may be well to consult a teacher and let your child experiment with various instruments before deciding. Some children prefer the piano, others like to blow an instrument, still others prefer working with stringed instruments. The piano has definite advantages because its tone is already made, it is a self-sufficient instrument, and has full chord harmony. It is common for a child to switch his interests, so don't be too hasty in purchasing an instrument. Many an instrument lies stored in the attic because of too hasty a purchase. Inquire about rentals at the school or a music store. When you are certain the child has an interest that will last, consult his teacher before purchasing an instrument.

Perhaps the most wonderful thing you can do for your child in his music study is selecting the proper teacher. He should have infinite patience, and love children as well as music.

The Practice Session

Practicing can be the bane of a parent's existence! Interest will run high at first. Discuss the length of practice sessions with the teacher. Two fifteen minute sessions are better than one half-hour session for a young child whose interest span is very short. What can you do to help? Provide a quiet, uninterrupted practice session. Drop the role of a teacher. Furnish encouragement, praise and patience. During practice sessions the youngster may experiment with sounds and chords, and play tunes by ear. Don't discourage this, but encourage practicing his lessons also. Watch to see if your child is hearing his own playing and mistakes. When he is aware of his own mistakes and he

corrects them he is doing effective practicing. Make every effort to attend the concerts, recitals and performances of your child.

There will be low points, and the child will be discouraged and want to quit. It may be well to visit privately with the teacher, asking his help in renewing interest. Have the child finish out the term . . . he will learn something, and his interest may be renewed. Beware of measuring your child's progress by your desire, rather than by his interest and ability.

Not every child will be interested in or be able to take formal lessons, but he still can become an active music lover. You can help him discover and develop in the areas of rhythmic activities, listening, dramatic play, creative activities, and singing. Each of these activities has a definite result and a carry over into adult life.

Baby Rattle Is Rhythmic Toy

Rhythmic activities can begin very early, the rattle being one of the first contacts with rhythm. The noisy spoon on the high chair tray is a rhythmic activity . . . learning the many patterns you can make beating on a kitchen pan or a drum, bouncing a ball, hearing the pulsation beats of a march and waltz are all rhythmic activities. One of the fundamental elements of music is rhythm and it should be considered as a natural feeling of expression. From these activities, the child learns not only the fundamental of music, but he develops muscular co-ordination, learns to listen for sounds, and gains freedom of expression.

Listening is a quiet activity which develops a sense of appreciation and imagination. In later life it can become a rewarding hobby. One of the greatest wonders of childhood is fairy stories. So many lovely recordings are on the market. When a child first hears music, don't expect him to sit quietly and listen . . . he will listen to the record, imitate, act out the story, and squeal with delight at sounds he likes to hear. Teach the child to use the family phonograph with respect, if he does not have his own. Store his records together in a place he can reach. When you are listening to records for children and buying them, check to see if there is an age level indicated. They may sound ter-

ribly silly to you, but they are geared to a child's understanding and experience. Be selective—there are many fine children's records available. Children may play the same record thirty times without a break. Close your ears, and remember he is learning by repetition. Short listening periods before naptime or bedtime are enjoyable for the child and the family, as it is a quiet activity.

Dramatic play develops imagination, and provides the child with exercise and freedom of expression. Singing games are a form of dramatic play. The child learns to play with others and gains a sense of fairness. Dramatizing songs, or acting out the words is creative and expressive. Creating dances, playing train, dancing like the trees and flowers are all forms of creative and dramatic play. Join in the fun!

Mother Can Help Child's Singing Ability

Singing is one of the most enjoyable group experiences we all have. Don't worry if your child has trouble matching tones. Sing some phrases to him and have him answer in the same tones. Help him hear himself. This is valuable ear training. Whatever the circumstances of your child's voice, make him feel he can sing well enough to sing in a group. The theory is, "Everyone can sing, some people just sing a little better than others." The feeling that our own voice is inadequate has come from some unkind word, from a thoughtless adult when we were children.

Your child may not be another Mozart or Romberg—you probably don't want him to be. If he can feel the thrill of a group sing, enjoy a concert, appreciate the beauty of the classics, and the wide, exciting world around him, he has grown up with music.

25M—6-58—5745 File: 12.11

EXTENSION SERVICE, SOUTH DAKOTA STATE COLLEGE OF
AGRICULTURE AND MECHANIC ARTS, BROOKINGS,
SOUTH DAKOTA

Published and distributed under Acts of Congress, May 8 and June 30, 1914, by Agricultural Extension Service of the South Dakota State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, Brookings, George I. Gilbertson, Director. U. S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.